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ABSTRACT

This paper reports the results of a survey of 60 librarians and teachers in Texas as to what they felt were the most often read adolescent and adult novels, and what adolescent and adult novels they would most recommend. Following a description of the methodology for the study, the paper presents some of the subjects' comments about the distinction between adolescent and adult novels, about reading ability, and about the distinction between classic and contemporary literature. The paper then presents the results of the survey, in the form of four lists: (1) the most widely read adolescent novels, (2) the most widely read adult novels, (3) the most often recommended adolescent novels, and (4) the most often recommended adult novels. (HTH)

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Some Recommended Adolescent and Adult Novels in Northeast Texas, 1980

BY

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What adolescent novels are the students in northeast Texas reading today? And what adolescent novels are teachers and librarians recommending to them? The five most often read adolescent novels are The Outsiders; That Was Then, This Is Now; Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones; Where the Red Fern Grows; and My Darling, My Hamburger. The seven most often recommended adolescent novels are Where the Red Fern Grows; Tom Sawyer; Old Yeller; The Outsiders; That Was Then, This Is Now; A Separate Peace; and The Call of the Wild.

In November 1979, we began a survey of librarians and teachers across northeast Texas to determine what students were reading and what teachers were recommending. We sent out approximately 600 questionnaires in two mailings, the first in early December and the second in February. Teachers and librarians were selected at random from the Texas Education Directory, but

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the sample included large metropolitan and suburban districts in the Dallas-Ft. Worth area and other population centers, as well as smaller rural districts throughout the northeast corner of the state. The questionnaire asked for seven responses: (1) a list of the five adolescent novels and (2) five adult novels that teachers and librarians see students reading most often; and (3) a list of ten adolescent novels and (4) ten adult novels "that you would recommend to students, of all reading abilities, grades 7-12." We also asked (5) how often teachers used adolescent novels in their classrooms, and (7) how knowledgeable about adolescent literature teachers considered themselves. From the start, we acknowledged the limited application of the survey, restricted as it is to a geographic area within the state. Even more, we purposefully did not distinguish or define "adolescent" and "adult" literature, preferring to leave that up to the respondents.

Of approximately 600 surveys mailed, we received 60 replies. There was some duplication in the second mailing, so that fewer than 600 teachers and librarians were surveyed. One reason for the low number of responses was undoubtedly the timing of the first mailing--just prior to the winter break. For the remainder we can only hazard guesses: teachers and librarians already overburdened with paperwork not wishing to fill out any more forms; confusion about the survey's failure to distinguish between adolescent

and adult fiction; apathy toward the project. Perhaps the results indicate that adolescent literature is not generally used in the schools surveyed or that it is not clearly distinguished from adult literature.

The respondents were good about keeping their recommendations limited to novels--only one title appeared that clearly fell outside this category: Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee. Several returned lists did not contain the requested number of titles.

Admittedly, there are drawbacks to questionnaires of this nature: they are often completed hastily (our deadlines for return abetted this); the recommendations are isolated and do not consider the individual students to whom books are recommended, always a primary concern when suggesting reading for young people; and there is much duplication. However, the lists do give some indication of what is being read and recommended. As such, they are a help to teachers and librarians wanting to keep current on adolescent reading.

Several respondents took time to write comments about the survey. Here are some:

1. Comments on our refusal to define "adolescent" and "adult" fiction:

"What makes an adolescent novel?"

"I'm not sure what you mean by adolescent novel, but if you mean what adults think are adolescent problems, then I would think

the materials would be soon outdated. . . ."

"Please clarify 'adolescent' and 'adult' novels--what about The Scarlet Letter; Alas, Babylon; Huck Finn; Lord Jim; The Red Badge of Courage? Where is the cut-off between the two? We at senior high can be of little help for grades 7, 8, & 9."

"It would be quite a task to count the fiction books which you choose as adolescent--exactly how do you class books as adolescent? Many could be regarded as both. Some English teachers accept the so-called adolescent novels for some students. Most teachers have the idea of getting some students to read any type of book just to get them to read. For their better, more mature students, most teachers would prefer them to read an adult novel."

"Some books that are well read are classified as nonfiction: The Amityville Horror. Something for Joey. Ellen: A Sort of Life Long Remembered. Eric."

2. On reading ability:

"Of course, not all students in this age span can read all these books."

"Unfortunately, I do not browse adolescent novels which do not challenge and interest me; therefore I do not know which novels are of interest on all levels."

"I would not recommend a novel without considering the reading level."

"This was difficult to fill out honestly. It was hard to

decide what I would recommend or what I should recommend. Some books I would recommend for 9-12, I would not recommend for 7 & 8."

"How can I say?--I match student and book."

"Do you mean books that would appeal to all reading levels or books designated for various levels?--not clear."

3. On ranking by popularity:

"As a librarian, it was difficult to confine myself to titles as the works of some authors are equally popular."

"As a group, I seldom see them pick up a book to read on their own. The books I see them read are the ones assigned."

4. On classics and contemporary literature:

"I assumed you were interested more in contemporary literature as it presents more problems than the standards, such as Steinbeck, Hemingway, etc. (Though why in some cases escapes me!)."

5. On the availability of materials:

"No adolescent novels because mine have continual reading assignments."

"Curriculum only allows time for one, specified novel per year."

"I can only list kinds of books that students seem to be reading if they are selecting their own books."

"I teach seniors and have about 300 paperbacks available,

but most of them wouldn't be classified as adolescent novels."

"The students have paperbacks available all year, and we have a four-week independent reading project."

6. Finally, a general comment:

"I recommend adolescent novels on a daily basis. Several teachers at our school also use adolescent novels as classroom reading--namely The Outsiders and others by Hinton, and The Pigman by Zindel. We have had tremendous success with these! S. E. Hinton can provide a link between teacher and teenager which no other author can! They love her and they love a teacher or librarian."

The most widely read adolescent novels are listed below. Novels noted fewer than three times were deleted from the list. Numbers in parentheses to the left indicate the number of recommendations.

(15) Hinton, The Outsiders.
(13) Hinton. That Was Then, This Is Now.
(10) Head. Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones.
Rawls. Where the Red Fern Grows.
Zindel. My Darling, My Hamburger.
(7) Go Ask Alice.
(6) Gipson. Old Yeller.
(5) Hinton. Rumble Fish.
Zindel. The Pigman.
(4) Kerr. Dinky Hocker Shoots Smack.
Neufeld. Lisa, Bright and Dark.

(3) Blume. It's Not the End of the World.

Bonham. Durango Street.

Clemens. Huckleberry Finn.

Daly. Seventeenth Summer.

Eyerly. A Girl Like Me.

Kerr. If I Love You, Am I Trapped Forever?

London. The Call of the Wild.

Peck. Are You in the House Alone?

Potok. The Promise.

Tolkien. The Hobbit.

The most widely read adult novels. Titles recommended fewer than three times were deleted from the list.

(15) Anson. The Amityville Horror.

(12) Mitchell. Gone with the Wind.

(7) Lee. To Kill a Mockingbird.

McCullough. The Thorn Birds.

Orwell. 1984.

Orwell. Animal Farm.

(5) Tolkien. The Hobbit.

(4) Foster. Alien.

Smith. Joy in the Morning.

(3) Benchley. Jaws.

Blatty. The Exorcist.

Bronte. Jane Eyre.

Golding. Lord of the Flies.

Hawthorne. The Scarlet Letter.

Hemingway. A Farewell to Arms.

Herbert. Dune.

Kesey. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

King. Carrie.

King. The Shining.

Potok. The Promise.

Steinbeck. Of Mice and Men.

The most often recommended adolescent novels for grades 7-12. Titles receiving fewer than three recommendations were deleted from the list.

(20) Rawls. Where the Red Fern Grows.

(14) Clemens. Tom Sawyer.

(11) Gipson. Old Yeller.

Hinton. The Outsiders.

(10) Hinton. That Was Then, This is Now.

(9) Daly. Seventeenth Summer.

(8) Rawlings. The Yearling.

(7) Armstrong. Sounder.

Cleaver. Where the Lilies Bloom.

Crane. The Red Badge of Courage.

(6) Alcott. Little Women.

Borland. When the Legends Die.

Hemingway. The Old Man and the Sea.

Steinbeck. The Red Pony.

Stevenson. Treasure Island.

Zindel. The Pigman.

(5) Blinn. Brian's Song.

Greene. Summer of my German Soldier.

Gunther. Death Be Not Proud.

Hinton. Rumble Fish.

Shaefer. Shane.

Steinbeck. The Pearl.

Tolkien. The Hobbit.

(4) Bonham. Durango Street.

L'Engle. A Wrinkle in Time.

Marshall. Christy.

Neufeld. Lisa, Bright and Dark.

(3) Bach. Jonathan Livingston Seagull.
Bradford. Red Sky at Morning.
Braithwaite. To Sir, With Love.
Cormier. The Chocolate War.
Eliot. Silas Marner.
Greene. I Never Promised You a Rose Garden.
Head. Mr. and Mrs. Bo Jo Jones.
Klein. Sunshine.
Lee. To Kill a Mockingbird.
Lipsyte. The Contender.
Peck. A Day No Pigs Would Die.
Zindel. My Darling, My Hamburger.
Go Ask Alice.

The most often recommended adult novels. Titles receiving fewer than three votes were deleted from the list.

(14) Orwell. Animal Farm.
Steinbeck. Grapes of Wrath.
(12) Hawthorne. The Scarlet Letter.
Lee. To Kill a Mockingbird.
Mitchell. Gone With the Wind.
(11) Crane. The Red Badge of Courage.
(10) Orwell. 1984.
(9) Bronte. Wuthering Heights.
Clemens. Huckleberry Finn.
(7) Dickens. A Tale of Two Cities.
(6) Adams. Watership Down.
Austen. Pride and Prejudice.
Buck. The Good Earth.
Eliot. Silas Marner.
Fitzgerald. The Great Gatsby.
Golding. Lord of the Flies.

Hemingway. A Farewell to Arms.

Hemingway. The Old Man and the Sea.

McCullough. The Thorn Birds.

Steinbeck. The Pearl.

(5) Borland. When the Legends Die.

Bronte. Jane Eyre

Douglas. The Robe.

Greene. I Never Promised You a Rose Garden.

Marshall. Christy.

Steinbeck. Of Mice and Men.

(4) Anson. The Amityville Horror.

Du Maurier. Rebecca.

Haley. Roots.

Keyes. Flowers for Algernon.

Knowles. A Separate Peace.

Melville. Moby Dick.

(3) Angelou. I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings.

Benchley. Jaws.

Costain. The Silver Chalice.

Dickens. Great Expectations.

Faulkner. The Sound and the Fury.

Frank. Alas, Babylon.

Green. Holocaust.

Hardy. The Return of the Native.

Huxley. Brave New World.

Jackson. The Haunting of Hill House.

Kesey. One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest.

Paton. Cry, the Beloved Country.

Potok. The Chosen.

Read. Alive.

Remarque. All Quiet on the Western Front.

Salinger. The Catcher in the Rye.

Verne. Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea.

Of the 60 respondents in the survey, 17 indicated they used adolescent novels regularly, 11 frequently, 8 sometimes, 5 seldom, and 5 never. Others gave no response or found the question non-applicable to their position. Of those polled, 17 felt they were widely read in adolescent literature, 27 said they tried to keep up with the area, 13 claimed to have read only a few adolescent books, 2 said they had glanced at a few. Only one had no response. As you will notice, several books appear in both the adolescent and adult categories, something we anticipated in purposefully not defining either of these classifications. But generally the lists separate titles that teachers and librarians believe either primarily adult in content, technique, setting, etc. from those they consider primarily adult. Not all the titles listed represent strong or effective writing. Some are clearly sub-literary. Others present potential censorship problems. Some are classic and first-rate literature by anyone's standards.

This survey and the listings are not meant to be exhaustive in any sense, but they should prove useful to teachers and librarians reconsidering their judgments and reviewing books with which they are not acquainted. We would not hesitate, however, to recommend books that do not appear on the lists or not to recommend some that do.